REMARKS

This is in response to the Official Action mailed October 3, 2001 for the above-captioned patent application. Claim 7 has been canceled. Claims 1-6, 8-21 are now pending in the application. Claims 1, 9, 10, 16 and 17 have been amended as is further discussed below.

A Supplemental Information Disclosure Statement is submitted herewith to disclose additional documents cited in the European Search Report for the corresponding European patent application.

The Specification has been objected to for lacking antecedent basis for Claim 7. Accordingly, the paragraph beginning on p. 10, line 16 has been amended to expressly recite the limitation of Claim 7, i.e. that the heat treatment is carried out for at least 12 hours. It is respectfully submitted that this amendment is supported by Claim 7 as originally filed and thus does not constitute new matter.

Claims 1-6, 8, 12, 16-18, 20 and 21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,667,942 (Nakao et al.). The Examiner's position is that Nakao et al. teaches a resist pattern forming method which includes application of a photoresist onto a smiconductor substrate; prebaking the photoresist in an atmosphere containing water vapor; exposing the photoresist to radiation; heating the photoresist; and developing following the heating step. The Examiner further states that Nakao et al. teaches a resist made of novolak resin and naphthoquinonediazido sensitizer, which can act as a dissolution inhibitor, and that heating may take place between 90 and 110 ° C. (Official Action, pp. 3-5).

However, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1-6, 8, 12, 16-18, 20 and 21 are not anticipated by Nakao et al. Claims 1, 16, and 17 have been amended to expressly recite the

limitation of now canceled Claim 7, i.e. that the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment. It is respectfully submitted that the amendments are supported by Claim 7 as originally filed and therefore do not constitute new matter. Claim 7 was not rejected as anticipated by Nakao et al. Indeed, the Examiner indicated that the subject limitation of Claim 7 was allowable subject material (Official Action, p. 13, lines 1-2). Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1, 16 and 17 as amended (and all the claims ultimately dependent thereon) are not anticipated by Nakao et al. In view of the foregoing, withdrawal of the rejection of Claims 1-6, 8, 12, 16-18, 20 and 21 as anticipated by Nakao et al. is respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 16-18, 20, and 21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,002,108 (Yoshioka). The Examiner's position is that Yoshioka teaches a baking apparatus and method for baking a resist film coated on a substrate. According to the Examiner, the coated surface is exposed to light with a predetermined pattern and developed, and that the prebake step stabilizes the resist. The Examiner further states that Yoshioka teaches a chemically amplified photoresist which becomes alkali-soluble upon exposure in the presence of a photoacid generator. (Official Action, pp. 5-6).

However, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 16-18, 20, and 21 are not anticipated by Yoshioka. As discussed above, Claims 1, 16, and 17 have been amended to expressly recite the limitation of now canceled Claim 7, i.e. that the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment. Claim 7 was not rejected as anticipated by Yoshioka. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1, 16 and 17 as amended (and all the claims ultimately dependent thereon) are not anticipated by Yoshioka. In

view of the foregoing, withdrawal of the rejection of Claims 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 16-18, 20, and 21 as anticipated by Yoshioka is respectfully requested.

Claims 3-6 and 8 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious in view of Yoshioka in combination with U.S. Patent No. 5,510,420 (Dammel et al.). According to the Examiner, the prior art teaches the equivalence of a resist comprising a novolak resin and a chemically amplified resist comprising an acetal-protected polyhydroxystyrene, and that it would therefore have been obvious to replace the polyhydroxystyrene with a novolak resin to obtain the present invention. The Examiner further states that Yoshioka teaches a temperature of 90°C for the baking step, and that in light of the teachings of Dammel et al., this temperature inherently does not exceed the glass transition temperature of the novolak resin. (Official Action, pp. 6-7).

However, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 3-6 and 8 are not obvious in view of Yoshioka in combination with Dammel et al. As discussed above, Claim 1 has been amended to expressly recite the limitation of now canceled Claim 7, i.e. that the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment. Claim 7 was not rejected as obvious in view of Yoshioka in combination with Dammel et al. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claim 1 as amended (and all the claims ultimately dependent thereon) is not obvious in view of Yoshioka in combination with Dammel et al. In view of the foregoing, withdrawal of the rejection of Claims 3-6 and 8 as obvious in view of Yoshioka in combination with Dammel et al. is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-6, 8, 12-19 and 21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,143,471 (Takata et al.) in combination with Nakao et al. with Dammel

et al. According to the Examiner, Takata et al. teaches that a positive photosensitive composition can be used to prepare a printing plate comprising a polymer soluble in alkaline developer, a near-IR absorbing dye, and a compound which lowers the solubility of the polymer in the alkaline developer, where the preparation of the plate includes imagewise exposing the composition and developing the exposed plate material using an alkaline developer. The Examiner's position is that while Takata et al. does not teach a heat treatment step in which removal of moisture is inhibited, it would have been obvious to combine the teachings of Takata et al. with the teachings of Nakao et al., which disclose a prebake step in a water vapor atmosphere. (Official Action, pp. 7-10).

However, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1-6, 8, 12-19 and 21 are not obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Nakao et al. with Dammel et al. As discussed above, Claims 1, 16, and 17 have been amended to expressly recite the limitation of now canceled Claim 7, i.e. that the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment. Claim 7 was not rejected as obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Nakao et al. and with Dammel et al. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1, 16 and 17 as amended (and all the claims ultimately dependent thereon) are not obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Nakao et al. and with Dammel et al. In view of the foregoing, withdrawal of the rejection of Claims 1-6, 8, 12-19 and 21 as obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Nakao et al. with Dammel et al. is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-6, 8, 11-19 and 21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Yoshioka with Dammel et al. The teachings of Takata et al. have been discussed above. The Examiner's position is that while Takata et al. does not

teach a heat treatment step in which removal of moisture is inhibited, it would have been obvious to combine the teachings of Takata et al. with the teachings of Yoshioka, which discloses a prebake step in a gas comprising humidity. (Official Action, pp. 10-12).

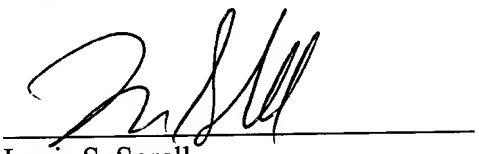
However, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1-6, 8, 11-19 and 21 are not obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Yoshioka with Dammel et al. As discussed above, Claims 1, 16, and 17 have been amended to expressly recite the limitation of now canceled Claim 7, i.e. that the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment. Claim 7 was not rejected as obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Yoshioka with Dammel et al. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Claims 1, 16 and 17 as amended (and all the claims ultimately dependent thereon) are not obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Yoshioka with Dammel et al. In view of the foregoing, withdrawal of the rejection of Claims 1-6, 8, 11-19 and 21 as obvious in view of Takata et al. in combination with Yoshioka with Dammel et al. is respectfully requested.

Claims 7, 9, and 10 have been objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim but would otherwise be allowable. (Official Action, p. 12). Accordingly, Claim 1 has been amended to include the limitations of now canceled Claim 7 as discussed above. Claim 9 has been rewritten in independent form to include all of the limitations of Claim 1. Similarly, Claim 10 has been rewritten in independent form to include all of the limitations of Claims 1 and 9. It is respectfully submitted that the above amendments do not constitute new matter.

Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the specification and claims by the current amendment. The attached page is captioned **"Version with markings to show changes made."**

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, reconsideration and allowance of all the claims in this application are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

In the Specification:

The paragraph beginning at p. 10, lines 16-19 has been replaced with the following:

The time for the heat treatment can also be determined by trial and error. Generally, the lower the temperature for the heat treatment, the longer the time should be. In all cases however we favour carrying out the heat treatment for at least 4 hours, preferably for at least 12 hours, more preferably for at least 24 hours and most preferably for at least 48 hours.

In the Claims:

Claim 7 has been canceled.

Claims 1, 9, 10, 16, and 17 have been amended as follows:

1. (Amended) A method of providing a precursor which comprises an imagable coating on a substrate, the coating comprising a polymeric composition, wherein the method includes a heat treatment step applied to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment, wherein the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment.

9. (Amended) A method [as claimed in claim 1] of providing a precursor which comprises an imagable coating on a substrate, the coating comprising a polymeric composition, wherein the method includes a heat treatment step applied to the precursor, the heat treatment

step taking place under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment, wherein the method is applied to a precursor coil.

10. (Amended) A method [as claimed in claim 9] of providing a precursor which comprises an imagable coating on a substrate, the coating comprising a polymeric composition, wherein the method includes a heat treatment step applied to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment, wherein the method is applied to a precursor coil, wherein the coil comprises spirals that are separated by an intervening material.

16. (Amended) A method of providing a precursor which comprises an imagable coating on a substrate, the coating comprising a positive working polymeric composition, wherein the method includes a heat treatment step applied to the precursor, the heat treatment step being carried out in an oven which provides an atmosphere whose relative humidity is at least 25%, wherein the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment.

17. (Amended) A method of providing a precursor which comprises an imagable coating on a substrate, the coating comprising a positive working polymeric composition, wherein the method includes a heat treatment step applied to the precursor, the heat treatment step being carried out in an oven which provides an atmosphere whose absolute humidity is at least 0.028, wherein the precursor is held at an elevated temperature for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment.